

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method, performed by a returns provider, of enabling a customer to ship a package containing one or more items previously acquired from a merchant during a
5 unique transaction, comprising the step of:
providing the customer with a return label to be placed on the package, the label containing a shipping destination of the package and integrated machine readable data representing at least a shipping origin of
10 the package and identification of the transaction.
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the returns provider is the merchant.
- 15 3. The method of Claim 1, wherein the returns provider is a service provider to the merchant.
4. The method of Claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the return label conforms to the USPS
20 merchandise return service specifications.
5. The method of Claim 1, wherein the providing step is performed by enclosing the return label with items shipped to the customer.
- 25 6. The method of Claim 5, wherein the return label is attached to an invoice for the item.
7. The method of Claim 1, wherein the providing
30 step is performed by the customer downloading data from the Internet for printing the label.

8. The method of Claim 1, wherein the shipping origin of the package is represented by the customer's postal code.

5 9. The method of Claim 1, wherein the machine readable data is barcode data.

10 10. The method of Claim 1, wherein the machine readable data is radio frequency identification data.

11. The method of Claim 1, wherein the return label further has a human readable code representing merchant-specific data.

15 12. The method of Claim 1, wherein the shipping destination is to a carrier center near the returns provider.

20 13. The method of Claim 1, wherein the returns provider maintains multiple returns destinations, and wherein the shipping destination is to a location closest to the customer.

25 14. The method of Claim 1, wherein the purchase identification data is an invoice number.

15. The method of Claim 12, wherein the machine readable data further represents merchant-specific data.

30 16. The method of Claim 1, wherein the machine readable data further represents customer specific data.

17. The method of Claim 14, wherein the machine readable data further represents product specific data.

18. The method of Claim 14, wherein the machine
5 readable data further represents trading partner data.

19. The method of Claim 14, wherein the machine readable data further represents disposition data.

20. A method of enabling a customer to ship a package containing one or more items previously purchased from a merchant during a unique purchase transaction, comprising the steps of:

5 providing the customer with a return label to be placed on the package, the label containing a shipping destination of the package and integrated machine readable data representing at least a shipping origin of the package and identification of the purchase
10 transaction; and

 notifying the customer that, by using the return label, returns are pre-authorized and that carrier costs are due subsequent to the initiation of the return.

15 21. The method of Claim 20, wherein the notifying step is performed at least in part by visual indicia on the return label.

 22. The method of Claim 20, further comprising the
20 step of using the machine readable data to assess shipping charges.

 23. The method of Claim 20, further comprising the
 step of using the machine readable data to communicate
25 information about the return to the merchant.

 24. The method of Claim 20, further comprising the
 step using the machine readable data to communicate
 information about the return to the customer.

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